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SUBJECT: AVIAN FLU DISCOVERED IN BULGARIAN DOMESTIC FLOCKS,  
BUT PRELIMINARY TESTS FIND NO H5

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¶1. SUMMARY: Avian Influenza (AI) has been identified in poultry in Slanchogled (a predominantly ethnic-Turkish village in the southern Kardzhali region), where at least 107 chickens died between July 11 and 19. This is the first suspected case of AI in domestic stock. Until now, all other reported cases of AI in Bulgaria were found in wild birds; testing in those cases found the H5N1 strain that is deadly to birds but not humans. The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry ordered all birds and poultry products in the area to be destroyed while tests are conducted to determine the cause of death. On July 26, samples will be sent to the UK for further testing. The two people who had contact with infected birds are under medical observation and show no signs of illness. The head of the National Veterinary Service attributes the infections to migrating birds or Turkish citizens visiting relatives in Bulgaria. No poultry products from the region have been released on the market. A campaign developed by UNICEF to build public awareness of AI will be implemented immediately in the Kardzhali region; the GoB has not yet allocated funding for a nationwide informational campaign. END SUMMARY

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THE OUTBREAK  
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¶2. Three domestic birds were found dead on July 11 in Slanchogled, a predominantly ethnically Turkish village in the Kardzhali region. Veterinarians first suspected that the birds had been poisoned, then later attributed the deaths to Newcastle's Disease (ND), which had struck the village months earlier. On July 12, tests came back negative for ND, and more chickens and turkeys continued to die. The first positive results for AI came back on July 20, after at least 107 birds had been found dead. As a result, 1526 birds have been destroyed in three villages within three kilometers of Slanchogled. The Government has disbursed a total of 14,555 leva (USD 9,500) in compensation to villagers. Veterinarians reported on July 23 that the outbreak was under control after the destruction of all birds in the village.

¶3. The Sofia Referential Laboratory has confirmed that the infection is mixed ) both ND and AI ) but it will take some time to isolate the AI virus because of ND's predominance. Test results thus far have determined that this is a low-pathogen strain of AI rather than the more virulent H5 and H7 strains that are dangerous to humans. Bulgaria is preparing six samples to be sent on July 26 to the UK's Waybridge lab (the worldwide reference lab for N1);

definitive results will not be available for 4 to 6 days after that.

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PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES IN FORCE  
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¶4. The head of the National Veterinary Service attributes the infections to migrating birds or Turkish citizens visiting relatives in Bulgaria. There are no large poultry production firms in the area, and no poultry products from the region have been released on the market. The Ministry of Agriculture has quarantined a 3-km zone around Slanchogled for 21 days, and will monitor a 7-km swath around it for the same period of time. Within the 3-km zone, samples of avian fecal matter continue to be taken for additional testing. When the 21-day quarantine period expires on August 10, birds will be reintroduced in 4 locations in the region and monitored constantly for 14 days. If nothing anomalous is observed, villagers in the region will again be permitted to raise birds and the local poultry markets will be reopened. By taking these measures, Bulgarian authorities are hoping to head off an EU ban on Bulgarian poultry. Police have established checkpoints in the Kardzhali region to prevent nonresidents from entering. Local residents may leave the area after being processed by the Sanitary Inspection units. The regional police chief has added special police operations on roads in the region to prevent the transport of meat and bird products outside the region.

¶6. According to the Minister of Health, the GoB maintains a stock of 160,000 packages of Remantadin and 2000 packages of Tamiflu. Two hospitals ) the Infectious Disease Hospital in Sofia and the Saint Marina Hospital in Varna ) are prepared to accept patients with AI. They each have 100 packages of Tamiflu. The Government intends to allocate an additional 50,000 leva (USD 33,000) to the National Veterinary Agency for consumables, equipment, and disinfectant materials.

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UNICEF PRESENTS PLANS FOR AI AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO MOH  
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¶7. On July 24, we attended a meeting at the Ministry of Health during which UNICEF presented its Communications Strategy for AI to MoH representatives and members of an AI Working Group, which was established by donor agencies in March. Representatives of USAID, WHO, and UNDP were all in attendance. The UNICEF campaign includes disseminating informational brochures in Bulgarian, and sponsoring radio and television announcements in Bulgarian and Turkish. The UNICEF campaign, which will target Roma, children, and farmers, emphasizes the social benefits of reporting cases of AI. Because of the ethnically mixed character of the region, the Sofia office has requested that its Ankara office provide Turkish-language materials, which it will modify for the local Bulgarian context. UNICEF also intends to add a component emphasizing responsible media reporting on AI. The materials will be quickly finalized for immediate use in the Kardzhali region, and then more carefully revised for national implementation.

¶8. Although UNICEF has been working on this public awareness campaign for some time, it has not committed to funding implementation on the national scale. The \$30,000 allocated by the GoB for AI is intended to fund other MoH events, not merely the implementation of UNICEF's communications strategy. In the absence of GoB funds in the short term, UNICEF has agreed to pony up \$4000 to implement the awareness campaign in the Kardzhali region. Its local representative stressed that the GoB must solicit funding from other donors if it lacks the resources for national implementation. Additional UNICEF funding may become available in September, and UNDP intends to provide \$20,000 for training.

19. COMMENT: The Government's response to the outbreak was prompt, but local veterinarians only began to suspect AI after field tests for ND came back negative. The slow response at the village level to dying backyard flocks demonstrates the difficulty faced by the Government in mounting a quick intervention to stem the spread of the disease, particularly since it lacks the resources to vigorously implement its National Pandemic Plan. We are particularly pleased with the GoB's rapid compensation of villagers for their destroyed birds -- this effort will encourage poultry farmers to report dead fowl quickly without concern over losing their livelihoods. The USG should continue to advocate a coordinated approach to AI that utilizes the resources of the donor community and urges the GoB to fully fund prevention and response efforts. END COMMENT

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